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AMERICAN OPINION AND BRITISH RULE IN INDIA.

BY SYDNEY BROOKS.

THAT the events which, during the last year or two, have drawn the attention of the whole world upon British rule in India should have aroused a peculiar interest among Americans seems to me entirely natural. No Englishman, at any rate, would wish it otherwise. It is impossible for us in Great Britain to feel or affect indifference to American opinion upon our work and policies in any part of the globe. American approval and sympathy are frankly valued; American hostility or criticism is as frankly deplored. Not for nothing have the two great communities, politically separated, preserved the surer bonds of a common tongue, identical instincts and aspirations, and a kindred form of government. They are bound to influence and react upon one another with almost instantaneous decisiveness and through a thousand impalpable channels; their opinion of each other's doings, whether favorable or unfavorable, cannot help having weight. Each nation at more than one crisis of its history, in more than one phase of its development, has been stimulated by the other's example and support, has been disheartened, checked or bewildered by the other's disapproval. There could, therefore, be no question of England's not caring to know what Americans were saying and thinking about the arresting incidents which have seemed, in some sort, to place British rule in India upon its trial. England did care and does care. Her hold over India is the keystone of her Imperial structure and the pivot, so far as there can be any single pivot, of her whole scheme of foreign policy. That hold cannot be loosened or that pivot deranged without a catastrophe that would reverberate disastrously throughout Asia, throughout Europe and wherever the British flag is planted. But it is not only because India is of inestimable

and, indeed, vital consequence to her that England feels she has a claim upon the interest of Americans in the state and fortunes of the great dependency. She believes that her work there constitutes an unsurpassed record of constructive beneficence, that it is the ultimate touchstone of her Imperial greatness, and that the more Americans inform themselves of the principles that have governed it and of the results it has produced, the more they must come to regard it not only with interest, but with sympathy, with admiration and with an enhanced pride in the achievements of the stock. Moreover, since Americans within the past ten years have been brought for the first time into personal touch with the problems and difficulties of Oriental rulership and have learned the alphabet, at any rate, of its infinite perplexities, England feels entitled to ask that her experiment in India—the most arduous and complicated and by far the greatest that any Western nation has yet essayed—should be judged in the United States with something of a professional appreciation and understanding.

It was accordingly with emotions of the keenest pleasure that Englishmen read last January the magnificent eulogy pronounced upon British rule in India by Mr. Roosevelt. Friendlier words have never been spoken by any American in connection with British achievements anywhere, and that such warm and generous testimony should have been borne by Mr. Roosevelt, the head of the Commonwealth and the most powerful, popular and representative American of his day and generation, filled the cup of British satisfaction almost to overflowing. "In India," said the President, "we encounter the most colossal example history affords of the successful administration by men of European blood of a thickly populated region in another continent. It is the greatest feat of the kind that has been performed since the break-up of the Roman Empire. Indeed, it is a greater feat than was performed under the Roman Empire." No doubt mistakes had been made and shortcomings could be detected, "but the fact remains that the successful administration of the Indian Empire by the English has been one of the most notable and most admirable achievements of the white race during the past two centuries." On the whole, British rule had been "for the immeasurable benefit of the natives of India themselves." There had been "far more resolute effort to secure fair treatment for the humble and oppressed during the days of English rule in

India than during any other period recorded in Indian history." "England," added the President, "does not draw a penny from India for English purposes; she spends for India the revenues raised in India; and they are spent for the benefit of the Indians themselves. . . . The mass of the people have been, and are, far better off than ever before, and far better off than they would now be if the English control were overthrown or withdrawn. Indeed, if the English control were now withdrawn from India the whole peninsula would become a chaos of bloodshed and violence; all the weaker peoples and the most industrious and law-abiding would be plundered and forced to submit to indescribable wrong and oppression; and the only beneficiaries among the natives would be the lawless, the violent and the bloodthirsty. . . . Every well-wisher of mankind, every true friend of humanity, should realize that the part which England has played in India has been to the immeasurable advantage of India, and for her honor, her profit and her civilization we should feel a profound satisfaction in the stability and the permanence of English rule. I have seen many American missionaries who have come from India, and I cannot overstate the terms of admiration in which they speak of English rule in India and of the incalculable benefits which it has conferred and is conferring upon the natives."

Mr. Roosevelt's panegyric, though the weightiest and the most welcome, is far from being the only tribute paid by Americans to the spirit, aims and accomplishments of British rule in India. It would be easy, indeed, to fill twenty pages of this REVIEW with extracts from the eulogies of American travellers, special correspondents and, above all, of American missionaries on what they have seen and known and lived among between the Himalayas and Cape Comorin. But I notice that within the last year or two a more or less organized movement has been set on foot for the purpose of persuading the American people that British rule in India deserves condemnation rather than praise; that it is harsh, oppressive and impoverishing; that it deprives the natives of India of any voice in the management of their own affairs; that it is a rule of mere brute strength; that it diverts the wealth of India to British pockets and crushes Indian manufactures for the benefit of British exports; that it has neglected education, fomented racial and religious strife and screwed up taxation to such a point that the natives grow yearly poorer and

famines more deadly and frequent; that it is now not only harmful, but superfluous, and that India would be better off without it. The agitation which has based itself upon these and similar allegations has been able, I do not doubt, to influence many minds. Its promoters appear to be men of feeling and sincerity—of more feeling, indeed, than judgment and of more sincerity than knowledge; they have had the ear of the press; they have proclaimed it their one desire to “lay the truth before the American people”; they have disavowed all imputations of hostility towards the British Raj; they have asserted that their object is not the destruction, but the reform of British rule in India; and though their propaganda was shaken by Mr. Roosevelt’s counterblast, it is still being kept up and unquestionably finds something in American conditions and in the American temperament to feed upon. Fifteen years ago it would have raged with little hindrance from one end of the United States to the other; we should have had resolutions in Congress, a deluge of pamphlets, monster meetings and all the other familiar paraphernalia of an anti-British campaign; and the comparative mildness and ineffectiveness of the agitation to-day are a proof of how far the happy revolution in Anglo-American relations and her greater experience in the realities of *Weltpolitik* have carried America away from the somewhat elementary standpoint of former days. Nevertheless, there is always in the United States a sediment of Anglophobia to be stirred up; India is a remote, an incognizable, to most Americans, I suspect, almost an incredible country; American sympathies are quick to resent even the appearance of oppression and range themselves strongly and instinctively on the side of the under dog; the material for distinguishing the true from the false and for bringing large vague assertions to the test of fact scarcely exists; it is nobody’s business in America to state the case for the British Raj; and the fallacies, the distortions, the accusations and the plausibilities of the propagandists have, therefore, met with a considerable, and as I shall hope to show, a quite undeserved success.

Perhaps the best summary of their contentions is to be found in a manifesto they were recently rash enough to issue by way of refuting Mr. Roosevelt’s speech of last January. Its tone, let me say at once, is respectful and even cordial both towards Mr. Roosevelt and towards Great Britain. The eighteen gentlemen

who sign it, several of whom are clergymen, appear to write more in sorrow than in anger, and while their facts are often imaginary and their language at times grotesquely intemperate, I quite recognize that they conceive themselves to be engaged in a task of righteousness. It is a task, however, that for its proper discharge asks something more than moral ardor. It demands knowledge, perspective, the power of appreciating the spirit of an alien environment, all the qualities, in short, that go to make the political instinct. But of political instinct the authors of this manifesto betray no sign whatever. They write of India precisely as though it were a somewhat larger Wisconsin and of the natives of India as though they formed a single homogeneous mass like Frenchmen or Spaniards. They seem incapable of understanding natures and mental characteristics and social conditions so far removed from their own experience; and they brandish the formulæ and maxims and shibboleths of modern Western democracy without the ghost of a suspicion that what is good for Oklahoma may not be equally good for India, and indeed for all the world. They either do not know or else they have never digested the fact that no other country on earth furnishes even a distant parallel to the structure of Indian society—a society in which the lines of division are still the primitive ones of race, religion and caste, deepened by centuries of incessant warfare; in which more than forty different tribes or nationalities, speaking over a hundred and eighty different tongues and dialects, and confessing nine different religions, are jumbled together in a formless and inextricable mosaic, and subdivided again into something like twenty-four hundred castes, each caste a distinctive, exclusive, separate entity; in which three-fourths of the people live by the land and nineteen-twentieths of them are wholly illiterate; in which faiths, usages, habits and customs are preserved with a jealousy and intensity far beyond the range of Occidental experience; and in which power is held, government administered, justice dispensed and progress furthered under the authority and direction of a handful of rulers summoned from a distant northern island to guide the destinies of one-fifth of the human race. To treat a country so formed and situated as though it were not essentially different from the United States or Italy, and to prescribe for it in accordance with principles that have proved workable only in the peculiar conditions of the West,

is as foolish, to adopt one of Lord Morley's similes, as it would be to wear a fur coat in the Deccan because one has found it a convenient garment in Canada. It is to display precisely those qualities of myopia, narrowness and rigidity which the world, for lack of a better word, has agreed to sum up as provincialism.

Of all their accusation the most serious, and if it could be substantiated the most damning, is that the British to enrich themselves have taxed India into poverty. They assert that "the wealth of India is being steadily and remorselessly drained away to enrich the land of her foreign masters"; that this drain, this tribute, this flow of treasure from India to England, amounts to between \$125,000,000 and \$150,000,000 a year; that England "has been successful in taxing India more heavily than any other civilized land is taxed; according to ability to pay, more than twice as heavily as England's own people"; that India grows poorer with every year that passes and in consequence less able to withstand the ravages of famine; and that for this increasing poverty British rule is largely responsible. I propose to take these accusations and disprove them one by one.

(1) In the ordinary and recognized sense of the word no tribute whatever is paid by India to England. The British connection imposes upon India the annual payment of certain sums. These sums, which for the three years from 1904 to 1907 averaged \$95,000,000 a year, are in payment partly of interest on debt and upon capital invested in productive industries in India and on moneys borrowed for building railways—say, \$50,000,000; partly of railway and military stores and materials—say, \$12,500,000; partly of military charges, including pensions—say, \$20,000,000; and partly of civil and administrative charges—say, \$12,500,000. In other words, for every rupee remitted India has received a full and fair equivalent in goods, services or capital, and Mr. Roosevelt was thus absolutely and literally right in asserting that England does not draw a penny from India for English purposes and that she spends on India and for the benefit of the Indians themselves all the revenues raised in India. It has, however, been urged that in addition to these known payments there is an unknown drain on India's resources in the shape of private remittances, and the extent of this drain has been estimated at between \$50,000,000 and \$60,000,000 a year. This, of course, is a mere guess and the probabilities are all against its accuracy.

The sum mentioned is more than double the annual pay of all European officials in India, civil and military, and it is preposterous to contend that the comparatively few European merchants in India earn more than all the civil and military officials put together. As a matter of fact, it is only a very small minority of British officials who are able to remit even a moiety of their salaries to England. Most of them spend all their pay, and even more, in India; while if there is one thing that may fairly be said to be indisputable in the history of Indian economics it is that the British have spent more money on, and have done more to secure, the material and industrial development of India than all their predecessors put together, and that under their rule wages and the standard of living and comfort have risen throughout the length and breadth of the Peninsula. The truth is that the theory of a "drain" rests upon the old and thoroughly exploded fallacy that foreign capital impoverishes the country into which it is introduced and that a surplus of exports over imports is a sign of national ill health. The authors of the amazing manifesto I am criticising appear to regard the excess of \$100,000,000 a year in Indian exports as a "tribute" to England. But the United States shows annually a huge surplus of exports over imports in her dealings with Great Britain. So also do Australia and the Argentine Republic. Are these countries likewise paying "tribute" to England or are the authors of the manifesto talking nonsense?

(2) That India is "taxed more heavily than any other civilized land is taxed" is a statement even more easily rebutted. The sum derived from every kind of taxation in 1906-07 amounted to less than \$1 per head, and nearly half of this was the proceeds of the land revenue. The land revenue in India is the precise equivalent of rent in other countries, the cultivator paying to the state what in Europe and America he pays to the landlord; and unless rent is to be regarded as taxation when the state receives it, and merely as rent when a private individual receives it, the sum paid in taxes by the inhabitants of British India is rather less than 50 cents a head per annum. The authors of the manifesto talk of a salt tax of 800, 1,200 and even 2,000 per cent. of its cost value. No such tax exists. The cost of production at the largest sources of supply—the salt lakes of Rajputana—is 8 cents per 82 pounds. The duty is 32 cents per 82

pounds. Therefore, the duty is 400, and not 2,000, per cent. of the cost price. Even this seems large. But so carefully have the costs of production, transportation and distribution been kept down that the price of salt to the Indian consumer is not materially higher than in England and is substantially lower than in France or Italy or, I believe, the United States—being on an average less than 1 cent per pound. Under native rule, owing to bad communications and transport, crude methods of manufacture, and a perfect network of inland customs and transit duties, salt was very much more costly, and was often, indeed, not procurable at any price. At the present day the inhabitants of British India pay almost exactly 7 cents a head per annum in salt duty. That is hardly an oppressive impost. Moreover, except the land revenue which, as I have explained, is the equivalent of rent, and a three and one-half per cent. customs duty on his cotton garments, it is about the only tax that the peasant, who forms nearly three-fourths of the total population, is called upon to pay. He has no tobacco tax or tea or coffee tax to meet, and if he abstains from the use of alcohol and opium and keeps out of the law courts he virtually escapes the tax-collector altogether. I assert without the least hesitation that no peasantry in the world is so lightly taxed.

(3) The authors of the manifesto are even less successful in their attempt to prove, first, that India is growing poorer, secondly, that her poverty is "the basic cause" of famine and, thirdly, that British rule is largely responsible for her alleged increasing impoverishment. India is not growing poorer. The gross revenues raised from her have all but trebled since 1860. But the increase is due not to the imposition of new burdens on the taxpayer, but to increasing prosperity and better management. There is no considerable source of Imperial taxation now in existence which had not already been imposed in 1860, and in most cases the increase in the total receipts has accrued in spite of reduction in the rate of assessment. Thus the incidence of the land revenue has been greatly diminished; the salt duty has been progressively lowered; import duties are smaller and all export duties, except that on rice, have been abolished; and the income tax stands at a considerably lower rate and has a higher minimum limit of assessment than in 1860. The yield of the excise duties has largely increased, but the increase is mainly

due not to enhanced duties, but to better administration and a more effectual suppression of illicit manufacture and sale. Municipal and rural rates are the only taxes which are to some extent of a later origin than 1860; and their total productiveness is only about \$12,000,000. The very first feature, in short, that strikes one in surveying the fiscal developments of India during the past half-century is that taxes have steadily decreased and that their yield in revenue has as steadily risen. I think that that is good *prima facie* evidence that the people who pay them are growing more prosperous. Let me on this subject quote a passage from one of Lord Curzon's Viceregal speeches: "Never," said Lord Curzon, "let us shut our eyes to the poverty and the misery of India. But do not let us be so blind to the truth as not to see that there is an enormous improvement, that there is everywhere more money in the country, in circulation, in reserves, in investments, in deposits and in the pockets of the people; that the wages of labor have risen, that the standards of living among the poorest have gone up, that they employ conveniences and even luxuries which a quarter of a century ago were undreamed of, thereby indicating an all-round increase of purchasing power and showing that wherever taxation could be held to pinch we have reduced it, and may perhaps be able to do so still more. It is only fairness to acknowledge these facts; it is blind prejudice to ignore them." I commend that passage to the authors of the manifesto, and with it the proofs that Lord Curzon brought forward to sustain his thesis. He showed that between 1893-94 and 1904-05 the capital sunk by Government in railways and irrigation works increased by 56 per cent. and the capital invested by joint-stock companies in industrial undertakings by 23 per cent.; that the savings-banks deposits had gone up by 43 per cent., the private deposits in Presidency banks by 71 per cent., the deposits in other joint-stock banks by 130 per cent., the deposits in exchange banks by 95 per cent., Government paper held in India by 29 per cent. and the amount invested in Local Authorities' debentures by 90 per cent.; that the amount of income subject to income tax had increased by 29 per cent., the rupee circulation by 27 per cent. and the note circulation in active use by 68 per cent.; that imports had risen 35 per cent. and exports 48 per cent.; and that the productive debt had been increased by 69 crores and the non-productive debt diminished by 16 crores. Is there a

business man or an economist anywhere who will declare these to be the signs of increasing poverty?

The poverty of the masses of the peoples of India is, it is true, abject and pitiable enough. But to charge it to British rule is grotesque. I have shown that under British rule prosperity is slowly but steadily advancing. I have shown that the sum paid into the treasury by the inhabitants of British India in rent and taxes combined is less than \$1 a head per annum, and that of this sum the peasant, who represents three-fourths of the population, contributes on an average, I should judge, less than one-half. Taxation, therefore, cannot be the cause of Indian poverty. You might remit the whole of the land revenue and abolish the salt tax and the customs duties, and the *ryot* would still be miserably poor and famine would still recur. The fact is that the social habits of the peoples, their litigiousness, their improvidence, their antiquated methods of husbandry, and their reckless expenditure on dowries and wedding festivals, have infinitely more to do with their poverty than any external agency has or can have. A man will spend three or four years' income on his son's marriage, borrowing the money without hesitation from the village usurer, who charges from 12 to 75 per cent. interest per annum; and it is there, and not in the 50 cents or so per annum that he pays in rent and taxes, that the true source of the *ryot's* indebtedness is to be found. A great leader of the Hindu community, Sir T. Mahdava Rau, a man of unrivalled experience and unquestioned ability, and a strong critic on occasion of the British Raj, summed up the question in a sentence which I would advise the authors of the manifesto to ponder night and day before they again venture to express an opinion on Indian problems. "The longer one lives, observes and thinks," he declared, "the more does one feel that there is no community on the face of the earth which suffers less from political evils and more from self-inflicted, or self-accepted, or self-created, and therefore avoidable, evils than the Hindus." As for what the authors of the manifesto have to say about famines, I would point out, first, that they have grossly exaggerated their numbers and the mortality arising from them, and, secondly, that famines in India are primarily caused by the failure of the monsoons. When the rains are regular and abundant, agriculture is possible; when the rains are irregular or insufficient, the main industry of the country

comes to a standstill and the Government is confronted with the problem of the unemployed on a scale beyond any Western experience. That the poverty of the masses greatly intensifies the strain of such catastrophes is, of course, true enough; but it is not less true that the wonderful system of famine prevention and relief devised by the British has enormously mitigated calamities that in former times used to be regarded as beyond the control of man, and that deaths from actual starvation have been reduced not, indeed, to vanishing-point, but immeasurably lower than in any previous period of Indian history.

There are many other points in this remarkable document that, if I had the space, I might challenge with equal success. In only one matter, indeed, do its authors seem to me to have reason, justice and truth on their side. I agree with all they say as to the unsatisfactory state of progress of education in India, and I am not without a certain qualified sympathy for their views on military expenditure. But outside of this I can find little or nothing in the way of statement, inference or argument that is not wholly at variance with the facts. These gentlemen, for instance, declare that the 30,000 miles of railroad built by the British in India have been controlled wholly by the prospect of strategic value and financial return to England, and that the revenue derived from them flows into the pockets of Englishmen. The fact is that of the 30,000 miles the state owns over 22,000, works them at a profit that is annually increasing and devotes the whole of this profit to the relief of taxation. They say that telegraphic and other news from India is closely censored by the Indian and British Government, whereas the fact is that no censorship of any kind or in any form exists. They declare that to-day fully one hundred editors are serving terms of from three to ten years in prison, many of them without trial, without having had opportunity to defend themselves, and in not a few cases without even having been informed of the nature of their offence; whereas the facts are that about seventy editors have been sentenced to prison, that all of them have been tried, that all have defended themselves and that all have been fully informed of the nature of their offence. They assert that India governed herself for thousands of years, whereas the fact is that every Empire which has held sway in India has been established by foreign conquest. They declare that British rule is based upon the funda-

mental injustice of holding a people in subjection by the power of the sword, whereas the fact is that there is in India only one British soldier to every twenty square miles of territory and every four thousand of the peoples, and that of the armed forces of the Crown two-thirds are native troops. They state that agitation for reforms which in America or England would be regarded as mild in India is punished by open or secret arrest and incarceration, whereas the facts are that the National Congress has done nothing but agitate for reforms all the days of its existence without the slightest interference from the Government, that 8,000 native journals spend all their energies doing nothing else and that the Government itself has recently published two enormous Blue-books filled with agitation for reforms by men of all classes and from every point of view. They pronounce India to be a slave empire, declare that "the Indian people"—I wonder whom they mean by "the Indian people"—have no share in the Government, and even have the hardihood to assert that Lord Morley's reforms will effect no essential change; whereas the facts are that the natives of India carry on the bulk of the administrative work of the Peninsula, that native officials vastly outnumber British officials, that leading natives sit on all the legislative councils and are consulted as a matter of course before any measure is drafted, and that Lord Morley has not only admitted them to the highest executive tribunal in the country, has not only vested them with powers for determining how the revenues are to be raised and disposed of, but has placed vast spheres of policy and legislation under their almost unfettered control. It seems, indeed, impossible for the authors of the manifesto to touch on a single feature of British rule in India without committing some absurd blunder of which any well-informed boy of fifteen would be ashamed. They appear entirely unaware of the elementary facts that the British, and the British alone, voice, however imperfectly, the sentiments and guard, however inadequately, the interests of the dumb, toiling masses; that they and they alone rise calmly above the distracting animosities and clashing rivalries of race, creed and caste, and work and govern solely for the common good; that they alone, to the best of their abilities, represent justice, liberty and equal treatment for all, and protect at once the Hindu from the Mohammedan, and the Mohammedan from the Hindu, and the peasant from the landlord. SYDNEY BROOKS.